



Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy

Ochoco, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests
72510 Coyote Rd., Pendleton, OR 97801

News Release

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National Forests seek public input on landscape-scale restoration project

PENDLETON, Ore. – In an effort to increase forest health across the Blue Mountains, the Ochoco, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests are proposing a landscape scale forest restoration and fuels reduction project on portions of approximately 1,270,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands.

“The current pace of active forest restoration on our forests is not keeping pace with forest growth, making them vulnerable to severe wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks,” said Stacey Forson, Ochoco National Forest Supervisor. “In order to promote a healthy and productive forest, we must look at ways to do planning differently, at a larger scale and faster pace.”

The Forest Resiliency Project aims to return the Blue Mountains to healthier conditions, reduce the risks of unusually large and severe wildfires, and reintroduce the natural role of fire to the landscape. The project will also contribute to local communities through reduced risk of fire spread to adjacent lands, increased jobs and supplemental benefits. The analysis area is located within the Blue Mountains in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington and encompasses portions of 13 counties.

The project proposes approximately 610,000 acres of thinning and prescribed fire treatments across the three National Forests in areas with the greatest restoration need. All forest treatments will be designed to create forest patterns that are more resilient to natural disturbance. Additionally, treatments will support safe and effective fire management. Proposed treatments by forest include:

- 118,000 acres of treatment on the Ochoco National Forest
- 212,000 acres of treatment on the Umatilla National Forest
- 280,000 acres of treatment on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

The proposal reflects Forest Service commitment to focus on the urgent need to restore dry forest landscapes in eastern Oregon and Washington. Decades of fire suppression, past timber management practices, and climate change have left more than 2.3 million acres of dry forests across the Blue Mountains overcrowded and vulnerable to unusual outbreaks of insects, diseases, and wildfires. The 2015 fire season set the record as the worst in U.S. history, with more than 282,000 acres reported as burned in the Blue Mountains. Because current forest project planning takes several years to complete, forest managers are unable to keep up with the pace of forest growth to restore these conditions.



for the greatest good

“To really make a difference on the landscape, we must try new approaches to project design and analysis, test new ways to reach decisions differently, while working closely with tribes, communities, and forest collaborative groups,” said Genevieve Masters, Umatilla National Forest Supervisor.

The Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team, a dedicated interdisciplinary team, was hired by the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region to tackle this critical issue and complete large landscape restoration plans, including the Forest Resiliency Project. The planning team intentionally designed this project at a large scale, explore new planning and analysis methods, and create flexibility for local units during implementation. The draft environmental impact statement (EIS) will be released this summer with the final EIS expected in December 2016. A separate Record of Decision will be prepared for each Forest and signed by the associated Forest Supervisor, but the analysis of effects will be completed in one EIS.

The success of this project depends on frequent engagement among a variety of interested stakeholders, tribes and communities. Three local collaborative groups within the project area (the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative, the Umatilla Forest Collaborative, and the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative) are actively engaged with the local forests on similar projects to integrate social values and address any local concerns about Forest Service project plans.

“We want to do what is right for the landscape, while balancing social and economic issues. We encourage all citizens to contribute to this important project,” said Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor. “Your feedback will help guide and improve this proposal through the planning process.”

The comment period is an opportunity for the public to be involved in the process and offer thoughts on alternative ways the Forest Service can accomplish the project purpose and need. Comments may be submitted during the 60-day scoping period, which begins with the Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register (anticipated to begin on February 5). Public engagement sessions will be scheduled during the month of March. Additional information on these meetings will be released in the near future.

The Proposed Action and maps can be downloaded from the web site:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/forestresiliencyproject>. Comments can be submitted online or by email: r6restorationprojects@fs.fed.us. Written comments may also be submitted to: Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team, 72510 Coyote Rd., Pendleton, OR 97801.

The Forest Resiliency project is part of the Forest Service’s broader strategy to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration in eastern Oregon and Washington to provide both healthy forests and healthy communities. More information can be found on the Eastside Restoration website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastsideRestoration> or by contacting Ayn Shlisky (541-278-3762, aishlisky@fs.fed.us) or Darcy Weseman (541-278-3755, deweseman@fs.fed.us).

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